

*The Union and Harmony of Reason,
Morality, and Revealed Religion.*

A

693. d

16

S E R M O N

Preach'd before the

University of OXFORD,

At St. MART's,

On Sunday, February 27. 1736-7.

By WALTER HARTE, M.A.
Of St. Mary-Hall in Oxford.

O X F O R D,

Printed at the THEATRE, for L. Gilliver and
J. Clarke, at Homer's-Head in Fleetstreet,
LONDON.

The Union and Harmony of Reason,
Morality, and Revealed Religion.

A

Imprimatur.

STEPH. NIBLETT,

Preaching before the

Vice-Chan. Oxon.

April 30. 1739.

At St. Mary's,

On Sunday, February 27. 1738-9.

By WALTER HART, M.A.
Of St. Mary-Hall in Oxford.

OXFORD,

Printed at the Theatre, for L. GILBERT and
J. CLARK, at Henry's-Head in Fleet-Street,
LONDON.

represented -- is an undertaking only to be justified by its extraordinary use and importance

JOHN XIV. 1.

---Te believe in God, believe also in Me.

TH E S E remarkable words of our Saviour contain as close an argument, and as pathetic an exhortation as can be conceived. We may infer from them in general terms, that as there is a plain gradation from NATURAL to REVEALED Religion, and as there is a real *union* and *harmony* between them, therefore every honest impartial mind, is, as it were, favourably pre-disposed and induced by the *former*, sincerely to believe and practise the *latter*. --- And indeed *Christianity*, supposing it free from all mixtures of human invention, supposing it rightly stated and truly explained, is unquestionably the most reasonable thing in the world. Nothing possibly can be conceived more worthy of God on the one hand, or more beneficial to Man on the other. *Christianity* in this sense is so far from clashing with the common dictates of *reason* and *morality*, that on the contrary it mutually illustrates them and enforces them.

To explain *these* points effectually and not superficially: to give tolerable light and satisfaction to the hearer: to harmonize things that have been so differently treated, and so variously,

represented--- is an undertaking only to be justified by its extraordinary use and importance.

I. *First* then, in order to lay a deep and firm foundation, I shall attempt to prove, that there is and ought to be a real union and harmony betwixt *Reason* and *Christianity*: and that no argument can be drawn from the *former* (rightly explained and duly limited) in dis-favour of the *latter*.

II. *Secondly*, I shall consider the *Law* of *Nature*, and of course *Natural Religion* in the same manner.

III. *Thirdly* and *Lastly*, after reconciling these great important Points, I shall endeavour to give you a clear idea of the *reasonableness*, the *propriety*, the *expediency* and *advantages* of Divine Revelation; --- Concluding with a few general useful remarks taken from the force and nature of the foregoing Discourse.

I. *First* then, I am to prove that there is and ought to be a real union and harmony betwixt *Reason* and *Christianity*: and that no argument can be drawn from the *former*, (rightly explained and duly limited) in dis-favour of the *latter*.

And here, if writers at first setting out would distinguish justly, they ought to consider *Reason* in three Senses:

The Reason of God: which is in other words, his eternal invariable necessary Omniscience and rectitude of acting;

The

The Reason of Things: which, so far as morality is concerned, is *that* difference which results from the unchangeable eternal nature of right and wrong, good and evil;

And the Reason of Man; which is that faculty whereby every particular person compares ideas of things, and judges thereby of their agreement or disagreement, truth or fallhood.

Right attention to these distinctions is of the greatest importance: 'Tis in the *last* Sense only that *Reason* is concerned in the present debate; and even here *Reason* must be considered not as an uniform abstract metaphysical faculty, but as a *personal* thing: actually exerted, variously imparted originally by the author of nature, and much altered afterwards by improvement or neglect.

'Tis also worth observing that the persons called *Deists* generally confound these *two* first Sorts of *Reason* with the *third*, when they declaim so perpetually on its absolute perfection, its unalterable unerring nature &c.

Such in particular is the conduct of a late admired Writer (a), whose name I shall forbear to mention, since I cannot mention it without reproach. First he tells us, *that Reason is an invariable principle, a perfect unerring rule*; Which in one Sense is certainly true in relation to the divine reason, and the general abstract reason and nature of things; Next he tells us, *that Reason to us, as men, is, and must be the same invariable principle, the same perfect unerring rule*; Which in another Sense is not true, for human Reason, by

(a) *Author of Christianity as old as the Creation.*

which

which I mean that Reason which the human mind exerts, is, by the nature of man often fallible, more or less perfect as circumstances vary, and always proportionable to the abilities of the Agent. From which sort of arguing, (the common custom of our Author,) 'tis plain that Reason signifies one thing in one proposition, and another thing in another, than which nothing can be more illogical, or more dishonest. Hence therefore nothing can be drawn either conclusive or cogent enough to set *reason* at variance with *revelation* and thereby supersede it.

Others have roundly told us in general terms, that *Reason is and must be a sufficient guide in matters of religion*: Which without doubt is strictly true in an explained and limited Sense. But if this Assertion be laid down as a self-evident truth without due exceptions and restrictions, then 'tis certain, from the very drift and intent of the Authors, (tho' the consequence be only implied) that the thing intended is to render all divine revelation needless, inasmuch as inconsistent with God's wisdom to give us a second Guide, after a first Guide which is truly sufficient.

The true state of the case is briefly thus. It must always be considered whether the above-mention'd proposition be spoken of *Heathens*, or spoken of *Christians*.

If it be spoken of *Heathens*, then *Reason*, supposing it duly exerted and attended to, must be a sufficient guide in matters of religion. It is precisely *that* rule which God himself has thought fit to give them, in order to direct their judgment with relation to truth and falsehood, right and

and wrong. If it be inadequate to such purposes, then there must be a defect either in God's power or will: in short, either in his *natural* or *moral* capacity. -- The poor creatures are insincerely and unjustly dealt by. -- They are not truly accountable and punishable for their errors and their sins.

If the above-mentioned proposition be spoken of *Christians*, then reason is a sufficient guide in a more restrained and exceptive sense. It is the guide that conducts us to divine revelation. It is a sufficient competent judge of the evidence, the propriety, the expediency, the advantages of it: It examines its grounds and reasonableness carefully and sincerely, consequently it leads us naturally into the belief of *Christianity*, and then modestly submits to it. So that *Reason* upon the whole, is the groundwork of all faith, and the test of all truth, and tho' it may receive supernatural aids and advantages from God's goodness and favour, (in compliance with the inattention, frailty, and corruption of the agent to whom it belongs,) yet still in the main 'tis in many senses a sufficient guide, since it leads us to the path where we cannot err on the right hand or the left, and since it judges previously of the straightness and goodness of that path or road to everlasting happiness.

Reason with these limitations, (which certainly are of such consequence as to prevent the highest presumption and heresy) may truly and safely be said to be a sufficient guide in matters of religion.

We

We are told further, "*That the Reason of things is a rule to God himself, and therefore is and must be a sufficient rule to us*".

I shall examine both these propositions, which are generally touched upon too slightly, with all the care and caution I can.

And first, to make the *reasons of things a rule and law to God, antecedent to him and independent of him*, is the most abstruse, the most fallacious, the most dangerous part of Deism that ever was invented. For whenever any *Notion*, (like this of our adversaries at present) implies at first sight great perplexity, if not contradiction: and when the plain common sense of our minds can never cordially be reconciled to it; then 'tis certain, either that some unobserved *Error* lurks at the bottom; or that several truths and circumstances lie concealed: part, or all of which, (supposing them clearly perceived and known) must explain, or alter the case.

These considerations ought to teach our adversaries diffidence and humility. But as such arguments have been known to fail, I shall not content my self with applying only to their modesty.

As God is the *first* cause, so of course he is *antecedent* to *things* themselves, (nay even to ideas) and of consequence to the *relations* and *reasons* of things. *These* likewise, as they subsist by him and derive their existence from him, cannot possibly be *independent* of him. Hence it follows that *they* are not eternally, unchangeably, necessarily what they are, as they subsist in the things themselves, (whose properties are the

re-

reverse of such qualities) but as they proceed from God.

Further, at the same time that God decreed things should exist, he established likewise their relations, fitnesses and reasons: not from any *arbitrary* appointment, as we shall demonstrate hereafter, but from his own internal invariable rectitude. As these relations &c. came originally from God, so of course they can no ways be a *rule* or *law* to him: 'Tis true he cannot act contrary to *them*; but that arises from hence, because he cannot contradict *himself* and his *own truth*; But in short, nothing, properly speaking, can be a *rule* or *law* to God: --- The design of a *law* is to govern and restrain from doing *wrong*: The design of a *rule* is to rectify and keep from deviating into *error*: Both *which*, are infinitely remote from divine perfection.

The fallacy which induced our adversaries to establish a certain *imaginary* rule or law, *prior*, and even independent of God, was apparently This: They fancied the Deity himself, except restrained by some external obligation, must be an *arbitrary* Being; little considering, that *infinite Power* itself cannot be arbitrary, when the opposite Scale is kept exactly equal by *infinite Wisdom*. In frail fallible Man (and there lies the mistake) meer inclination and pleasure are always placed in contradistinction to right motives and reason: But in God the case is directly otherwise: divine rectitude necessarily excludes even from omnipotence itself, All that's contrary to unerring truth, and invariable equity.

As

As to the second proposition, having shewn the fallshood of the first, and having destroyed all consequences that can be drawn from thence, I shall only consider it simply in itself. Doubtless the *reasons of things* are a real rule and law to Man: To assert otherwise would be little less than profane Scepticism and Madness. All I contend for is, That they are not a rule and law in *such* a Sense as to supersede, in any degree, *divine revelation*. -- Were Man a creature purely spiritual: abstracted from the body and bodily passions: corrupted neither by others, nor himself: and perfect as he first came from the hands of his Maker; -- Then the Scheme of our adversaries, I must confess, would be highly plausible and conclusive. But such a rule of action at present, supposing Men better and wiser than they really are, can no ways render Revelation useless. The investigation of most moral truths is too difficult, and too operose for the bulk of mankind; Consequently, as men see more or less evidence, their obligation to comply with such truths is weaker or stronger; If they see *no* evidence, (which too often happens in inattentive or gross minds) then the obligation is nothing at all. -- But the *Morality* which *Revelation* teaches lies open and level to all capacities. It has a plainness and a precision which no philosophy can reach. *It is a highway, as Isaiah prophesied of it, and the way-faring man, tho' a fool, shall not err therein. Ch. 35. 8.* It is not to be collected piece-meal, *a line here and a line there*, from the several Philosophers of different ages: Nor is it built upon such half visible half vanishing

nothing principles as can only be made out by the finest understandings ; But it goes directly to the *heart*, as well as the *mind* ; and convinces us very signally in this, as well as other cases, that God is *no respecter of persons* : but that he has *revealed* the knowledge of his laws *liberally* to all of us, and *hath upbraided none*. Jam. i. 5. --- This plain self-evident *morality* is enforced at the same time with the strongest Motives and Sanctions that can be conceived. Far therefore from clashing with the obligations of reason, it on the contrary explains them with greater clearness, and urges them with greater force.

This will appear yet stronger, if we consider the many inabilities of the human mind ; the many possibilities of our being mistaken ; the corruption of our wills ; the frailty of our natures ; the precipitancy of our passions ; and the temptations of the age !

Thus have I shewn from fact and argument, that Reason, duly limited, and the reasons of things rightly explained, can in no sense oppose, much less evacuate divine Revelation.

Nor am I conscious of laying any restrictions upon Reason more than I ought. Angry invectives against it are just as dangerous as extravagant commendations in behalf of it. Ignorant and superstitious men vainly and weakly triumph in a religion which proceeds not upon rational principles, and which 'tis impossible to make out ! But 'tis the great glory of *Christianity* as we profess it, to be the friend of reason : To be able to say unto *Wisdom, thou art my Sister*. Prov. 7. 4.

In short, Reason is the prerogative and shining ornament of our nature: the guide that leads us through *error*, to the proposed end of our journey, *happiness*! Its power is so extraordinary, that a man who thinks truly, cannot possibly act against it: Nothing can blind it, but some headstrong passion or determined perverseness; Which amounts to no more (if used as an argument against it in general) than if a pilot should resolve to embark in a dangerous sea, and then wilfully shut his eyes. For, to confess the truth, *reason* is not so much hurt by the fall of man, as the *passions* are: Like a Prince unjustly deposed, it is still capable of governing honestly and successfully, if it could be restored to *that* Throne which our irregular appetites, (and the many blindnesses and depravations attending such appetites) have usurped from it. --- And therefore God himself graciously refers his rectitude and our obliquity to *this* test of human reason: *House of Israel, is not my way equal, are not your ways unequal?* Ezek. 18. 25. Elsewhere he says, *come now and let us reason together.* Is. 1. 18. *O my people, what have I done unto thee, or wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me.* Mal. 6. 3. Our Saviour himself is extremely angry with the Jews for not exerting their reason: *Why of yourselves,* says he, *judge ye not what is right?* Luke 12. 57. St. John presupposes the conscience or reason of man to form the same notion of right and wrong which God does; (the same in kind, though infinitely distant both in clearness, and manner of perception:) *Beloved,* says he, *if our heart condemn us*
not,

not, then have we confidence towards God. 1 Joh. 3. 21. *I speak unto wise men, says St. Paul, (and that upon a very myſterious occaſion) judge ye what I ſay.* 1 Cor. 10. 15. I may add farther, that when the ſame Apoſtle (who had the gift of tongues and of miracles) forced *Felix* to tremble, 'tis remarkable, that he applied himſelf to neither one or the other of the ſupernatural powers above-mentioned, but that he *reaſoned* only.

Acts 24. 25.

Yet ſtill we muſt remember, that reaſon, as 'tis the faculty of a finite being, is always of a *limited*, and often of a *fallible* nature. To graſp at things, either abſolutely beyond the power of our comprehension, (and which for that reaſon are not eſſential to human happineſs, if we rightly conſider the divine goodneſs;) Or to graſp at things which God has reſerved as prerogatives to himſelf; is only in other words, if I may preſume to vary a Scripture phraſe, *ſeizing the Kingdom of Heaven by force.* *Seek not the things that are too hard for thee, nor ſearch the things that are above thy ſtrength: But what is commanded thee, think thereon with reverence; for it is not needful for thee to ſee with thine eye the things that are ſecret.* Eccluſ. 3. 21, 22.

II. Having thus rightly ſtated, explained, and limited the powers of human Reaſon, (ſhowing at the ſame time its perfect harmony and conſiſtency with Revelation,) I ſhall now in the ſecond place conſider the *Law of Nature*, and of courſe *Natural Religion*, in the ſame manner:

The

The Law of Nature *absolutely* and *in general*, signifies those eternal immutable truths concerning good and evil, right and wrong, which result from the nature of things, as those things are supposed to affect and obligate rational agents.---This Law in its full extent and perfection can only be truly known by the supreme Being.

The Law of Nature *relatively*, and with regard to the present debate, signifies so much precisely, (and no more) of those eternal immutable truths, as each man sees or finds out for himself.

God only, who created the things themselves, who arranged them afterwards with inexpressible beauty, variety, and harmony: who foresaw their several tendencies and relations, together with all possible circumstances and contingencies: He alone, author, disposer, director of all things, sees, (without variableness, or the least shade of confusion or obscurity,) all those several truths, infinite in number, and universal in extent, which make up what we call *absolutely* the Law of Nature.

Man on the other hand, whose knowledge is finite, imperfect, and liable to mistake: whose knowledge depends partly on his own care and neglect: upon living in such an age, or upon receiving such an education: and partly upon that greater or lesser degree of Genius with which he was born: (and which doubtless is the free gift and goodness of God;) Man, I say, considered in this light, takes in just so much of the Law of Nature *relatively* and personally speaking

ing, as the above-mentioned circumstances give him leave.

So that though the rule itself be universal and general, yet since a person may see more or less of it; and since *to himself* that person *standeth or falleth*; therefore the rule as to him must be a *relative particular* thing.

The Law of Nature thus stated in itself, and considered with this reference to man, is so far from opposing revelation *à priori*, that it rather calls for it and requires it: Especially if we take human corruption and degeneracy into the state of the question.

Yet the Deists have all argued here unfairly and inconclusively: Especially the falsely celebrated Author I lately mentioned. He continually shifts the scene between these several acceptations of the Law of Nature. He concludes from one to the other indiscriminately, without any explanation or restriction; And thereby gives us much better proofs of his dexterity than of his honesty. 'Twere to be wished he had attended a little more carefully to *that* reasoning, and sincerity, which he labours so much to be thought master of; Else it may appear, (I speak with charity and truth) that he only cried them up, as hypocrites do virtue, the better to conceal the want of them.

Therefore, as I observed before, a distinction certainly ought to be made between the Law of Nature *absolutely, and objectively, as matter of knowledge in general*; and between the Law of Nature *relatively, and personally, as matter of duty in particular*; Or in other words, between the
Law

Law of Nature, which contains all possible truth and rightness of acting; and between the *Light of Nature*, which contains only *that* portion of moral truth which each man sees, or finds out for himself.

In short, if we intend to judge truly and safely in the present case, 'tis necessary to consider not only the *Law of Nature* in itself, but the *manner* also whereby *that* Law affects mankind; Almost every thing in this world is *relative*, and must be considered in that view as well as others. Hence we shall find that the truths of the *Law of Nature* with respect to man, are *personal* things. The perception is various, according as the evidence of them is more or less. As well might two men have the same proportions and features, as the same precise degree of apprehension and knowledge. Thus in lower instances, the harmony of musick and colouring, the powers of thought and language, strike one person far more forcibly than another. The reasons whereby the mind is affected, are eternal and universal: antecedent to our consideration, and independent of it; But the affection itself is both excited and perceived, in proportion to a man's own natural genius; in proportion likewise to his care and application: together with the instructions and good taste he has received from others.

After these distinctions and explanations, what becomes of the boasted argument *à priori*? "The *Law of Nature* is absolutely perfect, therefore "external revelation can add nothing to it". &c.

In

In short, 'tis agreed on all hands, that men by natural conscience and the essential differences of things may know in the main what is good and evil. Some may proceed much further, and argue with great force and clearness upon the divine being and attributes, the works of creation and providence, the probable hopes of a future state, and God's mercy to penitent sinners. Yet still with confidence I affirm, no *subsidiary* system ought to be rejected, which, (besides being proved to come from God,) confirms these hopes, strengthens these motives, advances and adds to these reasonings. --- Nor would any *set* of men, after the least right thought and instruction, differ from me in this opinion, if they opposed revelation merely out of a mistaken principle: and not out of singularity, youthful levity, hatred to a particular order of men, and a vain groundless belief that the Law of Nature favours *some* pleasures which revelation does not. Take away these impediments, and the work is done. --- And as to *others*, the few sincere advocates of natural religion, let them only go their own lengths, and we are secure of them. An honest discharge of all moral duties and virtues is the best pre-disposition that can be, towards receiving the Gospel. *Ye believe in God,* says Christ, *believe also in Me!* The great Apostle likewise expressly assures us, that *the Spirit of God*, that is, divine revelation, *beareth witness exactly with our Spirit*, namely human reason. *Rom. 8. 16.*

This, I flatter myself, will be fully verified, if men will only seriously consider what has been said,

and pursue it in their own minds. Hence, when reason, morality, and revelation are harmonized, I will venture to promise them a few very signal advantages. Religion, literally speaking, will be *built upon a rock*; it will be ever uniform and consistent with itself; We shall not be obliged to exalt one truth at the expence of another; Nor compelled to *set asunder* those things which God hath conjoined!

III. Thus have I shown that reason, morality and revealed religion are all perfectly at union with each other: Which leads me naturally to my third general head, The *expediency and advantages* of revelation; And by the way is a very sufficient argument *a priore*, whereby to prove the *reasonableness* and *propriety* of such revelation.

For if, as it has been observed before, the above-mentioned several *systems* are no ways incompatible with each other, and if such interposition as we here speak of, is in no sense inconsistent with the divine nature and attributes; I would ask what opposite supposable argument can be assigned against God's assisting frail and lapsed creatures? Or why ought we to reject such assistance, especially when 'tis so agreeable to natural virtue, and so perfective of it? --- Please to observe the conduct of the heathens, and behold a full proof of what I here assert. Most of them believed in revelation of some sort or other; Both *Plato* and *Tully* speak plainly of its *propriety* and *credibility*; and as this belief met
with

with reception from all orders of men, (which could never have happened, if the thing itself was not probable and credible,) they therefore made it the true, or pretended foundation of all law and government whatsoever. I only say this to prove that revelation is perfectly reconcilable to the common principles of reason; As for *Christian* revelation, 'tis so agreeable to the justice and goodness of God, and so consistent with the wants, and natural expectations of men, that nothing, (of those things that depend upon moral certainty) can possibly be more self-evident.

I will add further, that as the truth of things allowed a revelation to be possible, so the state of man actually required it.

The doubts, the uncertainties, the vain-glorious disputations, which we see amongst the great masters of wit and reason in *Rome* and *Athens* themselves, plainly show us that the most enlightened *Antients* could perform but little. I will say nothing of the carelessness, inattention, prejudices, superstition, vicious customs, lusts, ignorance, and corruption of the vulgar. I will only observe, that the Philosophers themselves were ignorant of many great and important points. They hardly deduced any truth without fear and uncertainty; Many things they explained falsely, or placed on a wrong foundation; None of them had courage, most of them had not benevolence enough to reform mankind, and embrace the dangers consequent thereon. Lastly, which was an insuperable difficulty,

difficulty; they wanted proper sanctions and authority from God.

Let a good-natured Christian only read the dialogues of *Tully*, and the last discourse of *Socrates*, and I am convinced he will be most tenderly and sensibly affected, to see such misgivings, uncertainties, and mistakes in a sincere earnest endeavour after truth. And yet *these*, as well as the other *Antients*, (to say the least of them,) had inclinations to seek for truth, and abilities to find it equal to ours. Judge therefore whence this difference arises, and make the inference your selves. --- I might say a great deal more on the present argument, but as most writers have exhausted it; I shall only observe by the way, *That* when persons educated in the Christian faith, make extraordinary panegyrics upon the *Law of Nature*, and at the same time speak very coldly, and negligently about the *Law of the Gospel*, 'Tis much to be feared, (since the *One* confessedly improves and enforces the *Other*,) that they only honour the *former* in pretence, and have always a secret ill-will to the *latter*. *It is not for our turn*, say they to themselves, like the licentious men in the book of *Wisdom*: *It is clean contrary to our doings: it is made to reprove our thoughts, it is grievous unto us even to behold; The life it prescribes is not like other men's lives, its ways are of another fashion.* Ch. 12. 12. 14.

Having thus shewn the great *reasonableness* and *propriety* of Revelation, I come now to the *expediency* and *advantages* of it.

And

And first it gives us, (so far at least as our finite understandings are capable,) a full, satisfactory, and compleat character of God. This by the way, is a very signal advantage to human morality, which endeavours, in all proper cases, as much as possible, (though with infinite disproportion) to resemble the rectitude and goodness of the supreme Being; So far therefore as Revelation informs us better upon these heads, so far likewise it better enables us more exactly to copy divine perfection.

In proportion as we have clearer notions of the Deity, we have likewise clearer notions of our own *relative* State: As also of our original, our depravation, and our means of reconciliation. --- For though *Repentance*, strictly speaking, is a natural duty, and though men had great and assured hopes of mercy and favour after sincere submission and returning to God, yet still (till the fulness of revelation took place) they knew not *certainly* their real state and condition here; they knew not the true source and reason of human degeneracy; and consequently, they knew not the means of being restored, nor the terms of reconciliation.

SOME indeed have attempted to prove, that man in a state of nature, could not possibly form to himself any moral assurance, that God would vouchsafe to pardon sin, even after repentance. But here I think they have lost ground by endeavouring to push the victory too far. *Reason* certainly assures us that God will forgive a frail erring creature after due repentance and submission; But *Revelation* graciously proceeds
much

much further: It points out the very method whereby God has brought about this reconciliation, (matter of new incitement to devotion, of new obligation, and thankfulness:) It likewise tells us that God will not only pardon sin, (which questionless is *all* in strict justice he is obliged to do,) but that he will likewise confer upon us *immortality*.

This doubtless is his meer voluntary gift and goodness in *Christ*: It is what we have no real title and claim to, even though we were unerring and sinless creatures. Repentance, strictly speaking, is not at all matter of *merit*, but matter of *duty*; It is what a reasonable creature is obliged by the nature of reason to perform. And therefore if God, of his superabundant infinite goodness, is pleased to bestow *immortality* upon us instead of *bare forgiveness*, certainly we ought to express all the gratitude, thankfulness, and obedience that can be conceived. Our merit and goodness according to what reason and revealed religion tell us, can in no sense *extend to him*, Ps. 16. 2. Gen. 32. 10. 2 Cor. 3. 5. a man cannot *profit his Maker*; Job. 22. 2. Were we to bear him the strongest and most grateful affection that can be thought of, yet This at best is nothing more than strict duty and justice: *We can only love him, because he first loved us!*—Therefore upon the whole, *Immortality* is matter of meer free bounty and mercy: and of course cannot possibly be discovered otherwise, than by the gracious promise and declaration of the Giver. He alone expressly assures us, *that to him who overcometh in Christ Jesus, shall be given*

to eat of this Tree of Life which is in the midst of the Paradise of God. Rev. 2. 7. Ch. 22. 2, 4.

Revelation likewise has given the highest improvement to morality that can be conceived, by adding the external *Sanctions* of *hope* and *fear*, and urging them upon men's minds with extraordinary strength and cogency.

These *Sanctions* in any light give us a high idea of God's affection towards us: Either if we look upon *them* as express *commentaries* in *so many words*, upon what was before implied in the nature of things: Or if we consider them, as subsidiary *motives* to virtue, built upon the *passions*, in order to quicken reason to embrace happiness and salvation. Every way, they give weight and authority to God's laws, vigour and activity to man's obedience, and in short are the main arguments and vital principle of the Gospel.

The *Rewards* of Christianity in particular, notwithstanding what some *affected* moralists may say, are most justly and happily calculated by the great judge and knower of the heart. Tho' *they* apply themselves to the *passions*, yet they do not derogate in any manner from the powers and force of human reason: but rather, at least if we judge from effects, add to it, and awaken it. Being essential to virtue, or natural consequences from virtue, they imply no selfish mercenary temper in the person to whom they are proposed; and as to the far greater part of mankind, (which does not pretend to a constant dispassionate right judgment on all occasions and emergencies,) they are doubtless the great guard

guard and support of frail human nature. • Talk as long as we please, men are made up of *passions* as well as *reason*: *reason* is the *guide*, but *passions* are the *motive* of action: in proportion as they are the more *perceptive sensitive* principle, they are the more properly applied to. Upon the whole, I will be bold to say, (without any disparagement to un-influenced reason and disinterested virtue,) that the *passions* of *hope* and *fear*, together with the effects of them, obedience, gratitude, devotion, repentance, will in the end conduce most towards carrying us to heaven. --So that whoever invented this philosophical kind of *Antinomianism* which I am now confuting, (and which if I remember right is as old as *Epicurus*,) did not thoroughly understand the mixt nature of our *reason* and *passions*. He acted *insincerely* in the cause of virtue, if not *weakly*. ---At present likewise, the perfection of Christianity does not consist in prescribing a system proper to *angels*, but proper to *men*.

Revelation may be looked upon in another view, as highly perfective of natural religion. It not only urges all moral considerations more strongly and forcibly on our consciences, but it explains them also more clearly, more distinctly, and in a more personal applicable manner. It is compendious, and yet methodical: sublime, yet useful and intelligible in the highest degree of perfection. It conducts us to our journey's end, by the shortest, plainest, securest path that can be; *where the steps are not straitened, and where he that runneth, stumbleth not.* PROV. 4. 12.

As

As it adds new Sanctions built upon the passions, so it adds *new motives* built upon arguments purely *evangelical*. We are infinitely more desirous to embrace virtue and despise temporary pleasures, when we consider the *eternal reward laid up for us in heaven*. 1 Cor. 2. 9. 2 Cor. 4. 17. Hebr. 5. 9. Jam. 1. 12. 1 Pet. 1. 4. We find uncommon improvement in our moral character, when we contemplate the life and actions of our blessed Saviour. We are doubly induced to love and serve all mankind, (even our enemies,) when we remember that God freely forgave us, and that Christ voluntarily died for us. So that hence arises a set of *Virtues*, *new* in themselves, or at least taught in a *new* manner, and upon a *new* principle. I may add also several others, arising from the same source, and built upon the same foundation. Such as *self-denial, charity, humility; meekness, patience, resignation; suffering for the sake of religion; and above all, evangelical righteousness, or christian perfection*.

Some of these are the *only* virtues that can support us under extraordinary misfortunes and pains, trying afflictions and persecutions. Meer human reason, (supposing a deist capable of exerting it coolly in such cases) will afford but little consolation, in comparison with the assured hope, and steadfast faith of a Christian. View the *former*, (in his fallen, uncomfortable, dispirited situation) and, according to a most beautiful expressive picture in the book of Job, *it is all darkness with him and the shadow of death, nay the very light is as darkness*. Ch. 11. 23. View the *latter*, and though you see an equal weight
laid

laid upon him, yet you see a foundation able to support it: *He is perplexed, but not in despair: he is cast down, but not destroyed; As having nothing, and yet possessing all things.* 2 Cor. 4. 8, 9. 2 Cor. 6. 10.

Is it not surprizing then, that men should reject a *revelation*, attended with so many great and signal advantages; and *which* in general, is as much God's free gift and goodness to them, as superior strength, health, and understanding? ---God has thought fit graciously to talk to them, and they, vainly, contemptuously, unthankfully dispute the nature of his voice, and the possibility of the thing! ---Of course they render themselves inexcusable, in proportion as they think lightly of a Religion eminently good, excellent, and well-intended.

From what has been said it follows *First* in general, That there is and must be a *real necessary union* between reason, morality and revelation.--- All *truth* proceeds from *one* original, which is God: We see the properties of truth as clearly as the attributes of God; and are as much convinced of the unity of the one as of the other.

For, (except we can suppose things to be what they are not) *truth*, considered as such, must be uniform and consistent: It must have the same properties, the same tendency more or less; It may differ in degree, or in such manner as *means* differ from the *end*; But it never can differ in nature and quality. *As wisdom is justified of all her children, so she is justified in all her dispensations.*

There-

Therefore if it be once proved that Scripture came from God, it follows necessarily and unanswerably, that the truth of reason, and the truth of revelation, are both, (though not of the same kind) of the same nature: Both lead to the same end: And the second voice of God is as true and as worthy of him, as the first.

It follows further, even to a demonstration, that wherever the common notions of morality oppose revealed religion, or wherever revealed religion opposes them, there our own particular ideas of *one* or the *other* are certainly false. It happens here as in calculations, A man may mistake in casting up two numbers, and in the several truths consequent thereon: and yet the two numbers really terminate in some certain invariable produce, and must have such and such properties, and relations to each other.

And now let the world judge, what a wretched piece of work these men have undertaken, who have attempted to make union and harmony itself, matter of controversy and variance. Each party, vainly striving to do *reason*, or *God* service, has torn up religion by the very roots; For to *separate* in the present case is to *destroy*! -- As well the great Author of nature might lead frail fallible creatures into endless doubts and errors, as give them *one* sort of *knowledge*, or *one* sort of *virtue*, to contradict *another*.

Secondly, to reject a revelation, which has such *cogent*, I might say *absolute* proofs as ours, is the highest instance of ingratitude, unreasonableness, and inexcusableness that can be

conceived. For why should a person reject a system, which confessedly gives new light to moral truth, and new force to moral motives, if it did not privately clash with his own practise, or require greater strictness and perfection than he cares for attaining? --- At least, (to speak as charitably and favourably as we can) such a person is highly careless, and prejudiced: causelessly suspicious of a certain order of men, or extremely desirous of being thought a *wit*, and a determined *laugher* by profession.

Hence it happens, that he either sees not, or attends not to the evidence of revealed religion. He looks upon it before-hand as a sworn enemy to his practise; Instead of being commonly careful, he is so violently suspicious, that he believes, and trusts no one at all; His wit and imagination are always upon the watch, and not his reason and sincerity; Freedom of *thought* is what he boasts of, but freedom of *life* is what he aims at; and though he sets up for a great and intrepid genius, (superior to some certain obligations which he calls ignorant, and enthusiastical) yet in the end he fully verifies an extraordinary observation of *Solomon's* on the like occasion, *they that promised to drive away terrors and troubles from the sick soul, were sick themselves of a fear worthy to be laughed at.* *Wisd. 17. 8.*

However *Thirdly*, 'tis a very unkind and unsuccessful method, to treat these unfortunate persons with sharp satire and contempt. In the nature of the thing, 'tis true, we cannot describe unreasonableness like theirs, without some keenness and severity; yet still I affirm we ought to open

open the wound, with as careful and gentle a hand as may be. For such is the false pride and frailty of men, that they would rather be thought *wicked* than be painted *ridiculous*: And therefore the first step towards converting them, is to assure them, that we truly esteem them, and are concerned for their souls.

I am well aware of certain passages in the New Testament which seem to countenance very severe language against *unbelievers*: But as we know not the personal circumstances and aggravations of these particular cases*; And as upon a nearer view, almost half the texts usually cited upon this occasion, relate rather to *immorality*†, than what is commonly called *heresy*:) we ought certainly to guide ourselves by a stronger and greater number of passages on the other side of the question**; By the mild and amiable conduct of our Saviour himself††; and by the very nature of the gospel, whose end is universal peace and reconciliation in earth and heaven. ---Nothing can compel the mind, but *truth*: Nothing can pre-dispose it favourably, by *kindness*: And therefore for a plain reason, the ridicule, the satire, *the wrath of man cannot work the righteousness of God*. Jam. i. 20.

Fourthly and Lastly, let us endeavour *thus* to promote religion in our discourse and writings, and especially in forming and instructing the

* Tit. 3. 10. 2 Joh. 7. 9. 10. 1 Tim. 1. 20. 1 Cor. 16. 22.

† Gal. 5. 20. Tit. 1. 11. Ch. 3. 11.

** Mat. 7. 1. &c. Rom. 14. 4, 10. Gal. 6. 1. Phil. 4. 5. Col. 3. 14. 2 Tim. 2. 24, 25. Tit. 3. 2, 3. Jam. 3. 13. Ch. 4. 13.

1 Joh. 2. 12. 1 Joh. 4. 20. 2 Thes. 3. 15.

†† Mat. 12. 18, 19, 20. Ch. 11. 29. Luke. 9. 55. Joh. 13. 35.

young tender minds of *this place*. Let us first lay a firm and deep foundation in reason and morality, and then let us add the beautiful super-structure of Christianity. Let us remember that the *kingdom of truth cannot be divided against itself*; and that each of the above-mentioned systems magnified in such a manner as to exclude the other, *cannot stand as is not of God*. --- 'Tis true, We are set apart *here*, for the promotion of every art and science, which serves to delight or instruct us: To soften our cares, or refine our pleasures; Yet still we must deeply and seriously consider, that our great and principal duty consists, in understanding rightly the obligations of Morality and Christianity, and explaining them accordingly. Every thing else is only the luxuriance and garniture of the mind. The ornament rather than the duty of life: Not our business, but our amusement, Not our studies, but our idleness; no ways capable, strictly speaking, either of charming, or satisfying a reasonable immortal soul.

In short, 'tis from *this place* that the Church is to receive its greatest support, and infidelity, by a natural consequence, its strongest opposition. And indeed with pleasure I flatter myself that DEISM, (in spite of all its success and encouragement) never will conquer this sacred Asylum, this sure retreat of knowledge and religion. In strict truth it never can, if a certain noted observation be true; "A little learning makes men irreligious, a great deal constantly preserves them, under a sober temperate veneration for God".

Let

Let us only place Christianity upon the reasonable foundation above-mentioned, and promote it in that amiable benevolent manner I have recommended to you, and doubtless we shall be enabled, either to avert that unmerciful malice which pursues us at present, or support it like men. *Wherefore my beloved Brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable: always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour will not be in vain in the Lord.*
 1 Cor. 15. 58.

F I N I S.

Let us only place Christianity upon the
 possible foundation above-mentioned, and pro-
 mote it in that amiable benevolent manner I
 have recommended to you, and doubtless we
 shall be enabled, either to avert that unmerciful
 justice which pursues us at present, or support it
 like men. Therefore my beloved Brethren, be ye
 steadfast, unmovable: always abounding in the
 work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that
 your labour will not be in vain in the Lord.
 1 Cor. 15. 58.

F A W I S
